



His LYF in Mine

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LYF Memories

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Experiencing LYO in Our Partner Synod



By Amanda Tompkins, member of St. Paul, Tannersville, and LYF Historian

What does it mean to have Jesus in your life? How can we show others what it's like? These are questions that our synod's youth were asking themselves at the annual LYF gathering at Shawnee Inn on the weekend of December 3-5. The theme, His LYF in Mine, was discussed throughout the weekend at devotions and in sermons from our chaplain, the Rev. Lori Kochanski, and Bishop Strobel. Guests included our music leaders for the weekend, the Rev. Bob Fatzinger and Jean Sandberg.

At check-in on Friday night, the air was buzzing with anticipation of the days ahead. Those who had never attended an LYF gathering were just as excited about the weekend as those who had attended in the past. We had some time to get acquainted in small groups and then were off to the first plenary session.

Two of the LYF advisors (the Rev. Tricia McMackin and Bruce Saylor) performed a skit for us to explain the rules of dorm life, which left the entire assembly laughing uncontrollably.

Plenaries can easily turn into the most boring time of your life. To counteract this, our LYF board had the solution: candy toss! At least once every plenary, right as things were starting to drag, the officers yelled "CANDY TOSS!" and then proceeded to throw candy into the crowd (no injuries



were reported).

In the first plenary, nominations from the floor were taken for the offices of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. And at the close of this first plenary, we held evening devotions, which prepared everyone for the spiritually enhancing and promising days ahead.

Saturday was a full and tiring day. After breakfast, morning devotions were held. The bishop offered an inspirational message about how our life is on loan to us from God.

The second plenary began with introductions to more guests. Two former LYF presidents joined us for the day: Matthew Suarez and Mike Scholtes, who also led a workshop. Nominees were introduced and gave speeches and the mission district meeting rooms were announced. Before and after lunch, the youth attended workshops. The topics ranged from "Pentagrams and Crosses," a workshop that included education and discussion on Wicca and Christianity, to "Out there in God's World," a workshop for high school seniors whose lives would be changing after graduation.

In the afternoon plenary, following elections for board members and officers, topics for open space were announced. Although open space is a fairly new addition to the agenda (it was added four years ago), it is a favorite among participants. Open space is a time for youth to get away from chaperones and hold discussions without the presence of adults. Individuals announced topics and rooms were designated for each.

Following free time and dinner, the last plenary of the day began with the announcement of election results. New officers are Walt Hampton (president), Becky Montes De Oca (vice president), Hillary Bender (treasurer) and Laura Printz (secretary). Afterwards we held a service for healing and our chaplain again delivered a remarkable message and led an uplifting service.

Discussions during open space that night were reportedly lively, involved and sometimes controversial. Social time and refreshments were followed by reflection time in congregational groups. We all went to bed before the 1 a.m. curfew.

During the final plenary session on Sunday morning, we watched a PowerPoint presentation put together from the

pictures taken by advisor David Renninger. The morning ended with a Eucharist service. A youth choir sang the anthem and provided support for the service music and the new LYF officers were installed. Sadly, it was then time to bid farewell to our new and old friends.

This year's LYF gathering was spiritually inspiring and socially refreshing, and not one participant showed signs of having anything less than a great time. A big thank you to the entire LYF board, the planning committees, the Shawnee Inn, the adult advisors, and all the participants who made the weekend possible.





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By Michael J. Scholtes

In December 1989, as a ninth-grader, I attended the second annual Lutheran Youth Fellowship Assembly. Four years later, I recalled the experience in Partners in the Spirit: "When the assembly rolled around, I was apprehensive. What should I expect? I'd never been to anything like this before. Here I was, this awkward, self-conscious little kid among this group of a hundred or so people I didn't know, many of whom were two or three years older than I. I was scared. I started wishing for Sunday to come, so I could go home. But pretty soon I made a new friend, a really outgoing girl named Mickey saw that I was alone, and she hung out with me the whole weekend."

Over the next few years, I made many more friends at synod youth events, and I found LYF to be my church home. While I was very active in my home congregation (St. John's, St. Johns), and while I know that I was loved and supported by that congregation, I never felt like I fit in there during my high school years.

The place I found God most clearly, the place I felt part of a powerful Christian community, was Lutheran Youth Fellowship. The first weekend in December became the most precious time of year to me. I was elected to the LYF Board, first as Hazleton-Lehigh Mission District representative, and later as vice president.

I found that this special community was not only a place of



fellowship, but also of service. My most powerful memory of LYF's service was at a special one-day synod assembly in 1992, which was called to deal with synod restructuring and the morale of rostered leaders. The LYF board heard about this assembly, which promised to be emotional and controversial, and we wondered what we could do to help. We planned a prayer vigil, to be held just down the hall from the assembly, and remained in prayer all day as the assembly met.

In December 2004, 15 years after I entered the second LYF Assembly as a ninth-grader, I entered the 17th LYF Assembly as a workshop leader. I'm now an associate in ministry, serving as Director of Education/Pastoral Assistant at St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Perkasio (Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod).

Being at Shawnee Inn was a wonderful homecoming. As I looked out into the crowd of young people, I imagined myself there among them. I wondered how many of them would feel the power of God through LYF as I have. I wondered how many of them would one day enter the rostered ministry, thanks in great part to the role that LYF plays in their lives. A few things had changed, but it was clear to me that the core of LYF is as it's always been: a committed group of young people searching for God, and searching for ways to share God's love in the world.

When I was a high-school senior, I wrote an article for Partners in the Spirit about the role LYF had played in my life. The final sentence read, "I'd like to thank the whole synod, for being so sensitive to the needs of youth, and for forming this amazing organization called Lutheran Youth Fellowship." I can't think of any better way to end this article today. Thank you again.

Michael J. Scholtes
December 8, 2004

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Voting members to the annual LYF assembly December 3-5, 2004, elected new officers and board members.

The officers (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) are elected for a one-year term that begins in June 2005 and ends in June 2006. Board member terms run from December 2004 to the assembly in December 2005.

Elected president for 2005-2006 was Walt Hampton. Walt is a junior at Brandywine High School, where he plays cymbals in the drumline and tuba in the band. A member of Christ Lutheran Church, Dryville, Walt teaches the third grade Sunday church school class and is the youth representative on the congregation council. "I enjoy attending youth group and participating in synod sponsored youth events," writes Walt, adding "I'm really excited about going to Argentina." (Read Walt's reflections on being chosen to go on the servant event in the December issue of Partners.)

Newly elected vice president Becky Montes de Oca is a sophomore at Stroudsburg High School. In the past year, she was the representative to the LYF Board for the Pocono Mission District. She helped to start a new youth group at her church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Tannersville. She is a second-degree black belt and plays both guitar and viola. She is also very involved with the drama and music programs in her school. "God is such a huge part of my life," writes Becky. "I feel as though my biggest expression of faith has been through my music. I truly believe that the youth are the key to the church."



Laura Printz is the newly elected secretary of LYF. A member of Hope Lutheran Church, Reading, Laura is in the eleventh grade at Reading High School, where she is in the chorus and also involved in their after school gospel choir. She is in the top three percent of her junior class, which currently has 818 students. At Hope, Laura is active in the youth group and three choirs. When not at school or church, Laura says she enjoys “hanging out with my friends, reading, writing, and helping my parents around the house. My pet peeve is not having myself organized.” She lives with her parents, her older brother, and her dog, who, says Laura, “still does not realize he is not young and cannot do gymnastics.”

Also selected to attend the youth servant event in Argentina is newly elected LYF treasurer, Hillary Bender. (Read her article in the December issue of Partners.) Hillary is in tenth grade at Saucon Valley High School, where she plays varsity soccer, and is a member at New Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Hellertown. Hillary “loves horses and hanging out with my friends. This year I’ve been the Bethlehem Easton Mission District representative to the LYF board.”

The following were elected as representatives to the LYF board from their mission districts:

Bethlehem-Easton:

Elizabeth Ziegler, New Jerusalem, Hellertown; alternate: Josh Ravier, New Jerusalem, Hellertown

East Berks:

Josh Schaeffer, Friedens, Oley; alternate: James Hampton, Christ, Dryville.

Hazleton/Lehigh:

Jenifer Moore, Christ, Jim Thorpe; alternate: Alex Nichols, Christ, Jim Thorpe

Lehigh:

Meredith Schuessler, Holy Spirit, Emmaus; alternate: Lorene Henderson, Holy Spirit, Emmaus

Northern Lehigh Valley:

Rachel Tretiak, Hope, Cherryville; alternate: Nick Steiner, Hope, Cherryville

Pocono:

Travis LaBarre, Trinity, Bangor; alternate: Tori Dini, St. Paul,

Tannersville

Schuylkill:

Samantha Wood, Trinity, Pottsville; alternate: K C Smith, St. Paul, Tower City

Scranton/Wilkes-Barre:

None

West Berks:

Randi Sweigart, Hope, Reading; alternate: Julio Rodriguez, Hope, Reading



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By the Rev. Jane Kropa, UCC pastor serving Huffs Union Church

In October two groups of visitors from the Landeskirche of Saxony were welcomed to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod area — one group of 20 youth and their youth advisors, and one intergenerational group.

The youth, from two church districts, the Loebau/Zittau district located near Dresden and the Borna district near Leipzig, arrived in the United States on October 8, staying in homes of members of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Easton. Moving into the East and West Berks Mission Districts territory, the youth visited a school in Reading, Hawk Mountain, Cabelas, and the Amish country, attended a football game, and worked on a service project with American youth.

On Sunday, October 17, they worshipped in the congregations of the host families — Trinity, Bechtelsville; Trinity, Reading; Huff's, Alburdis, and St John, Reading, before traveling north to see the Ashland Coal Mine and stay with members of Trinity, Valley View. After visiting Niagara Falls, the group was met by Deaconess Deborah Graf, who joined them to visit New York City and fulfill one youth's dream of swimming in the Atlantic Ocean!

The youth commented on how planned the typical American teenager's day is. School, after-school activities including sports, and homework take up most of the time of our youth. Although there was some time just to hang out together, the



German youth wished there could have been more of this time with American youth. They also were amazed to see how full American churches are (Germans have very poor church attendance) and the number of youth active in our congregations' worship services.

The intergenerational group visited Reading and Valley View and stayed in the homes of members of Trinity, Reading, Holy Spirit, Reading, St. John, Reading and Trinity, Valley View. A meaningful part of the visit was the time spent in a retreat with American laypersons and clergy, led by Mike Bennethum, held at Mt. Zion, Krumsville. The focus of the day was "Being Christian in a Secular Society."

The visit was coordinated by the Saxony Companion Synod Committee. In June 2005, a delegation from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod is invited to visit our partners in the Landeskirche of Saxony.

PHOTO OF YOUTH

Standing in sanctuary of Huff's church:

Boys from left to right: Andreas Lohmann, Ronny Fleischer, Thomas Freitag, Martin Augustin.

Girls from left to right: Anne Bergmann and Kristin Meinert.

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By Emily Bender, New Jerusalem, Hellertown

The e-mail came in mid-September: I was invited to visit the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin for their Lutheran Youth Organization's annual assembly (Godstock), to be held in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Immediately, I was excited — not only to escape Pennsylvania for a little while, but also to look at another way of gathering youth together from across a synod.

Our Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod LYF assemblies have always been special to me, and the opportunity to participate in two gatherings in one year was definitely something I looked forward to.

Thankfully, I had the help of Greg Kaufman, an adult advisor to their LYO, who helped me figure out flight schedules and the logistics of getting myself to Godstock on time.

It took almost an entire day of traveling, but I got there in one piece. As I stepped out of the terminal with Mary Toufar, an advisor to the NW Synod of Wisconsin's LYO and the mother of Josh (see the March 2004 issue of Partners), I got a little nervous. This was my first time traveling alone, and I was a pretty good distance from home.

But in no time I was having a blast. Everyone there was so kind to me and all of them took me under their wings. I soon learned that their LYF board and assemblies are set up differently from ours, but the end result was still the same —



Lutheran youth coming together to worship God and have a great time doing it.

I also got to witness some very diverse styles of praise. Peder Eide led a contemporary worship service for most of the weekend, and Agape brought in an energetic hip-hop vibe for Saturday night and Sunday morning.

The experience was one I will never forget and I thank everyone from both synods who helped me take this journey.

